

The North Carolina Institute for Public Health: Science into Service

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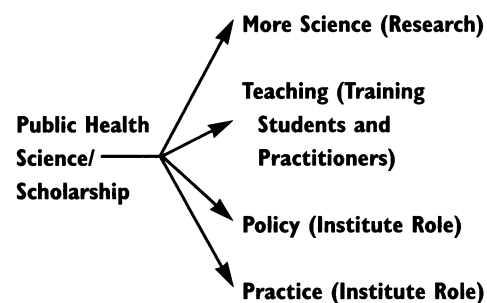
The School of Public Health at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a rich heritage of outreach and service. Throughout the school's history, students have gained valuable experience in health organizations across the state, providing service while they have learned.

Until recently, however, the school did not have an explicit focus on meeting the public health needs of the state through science and scholarship. This changed when, in 1998, a task force of faculty, providers and citizens was led by Carmen Hooker Buell to create the framework for the North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NC-IPH). After securing the endorsement of school and university administrators, the new Insti-

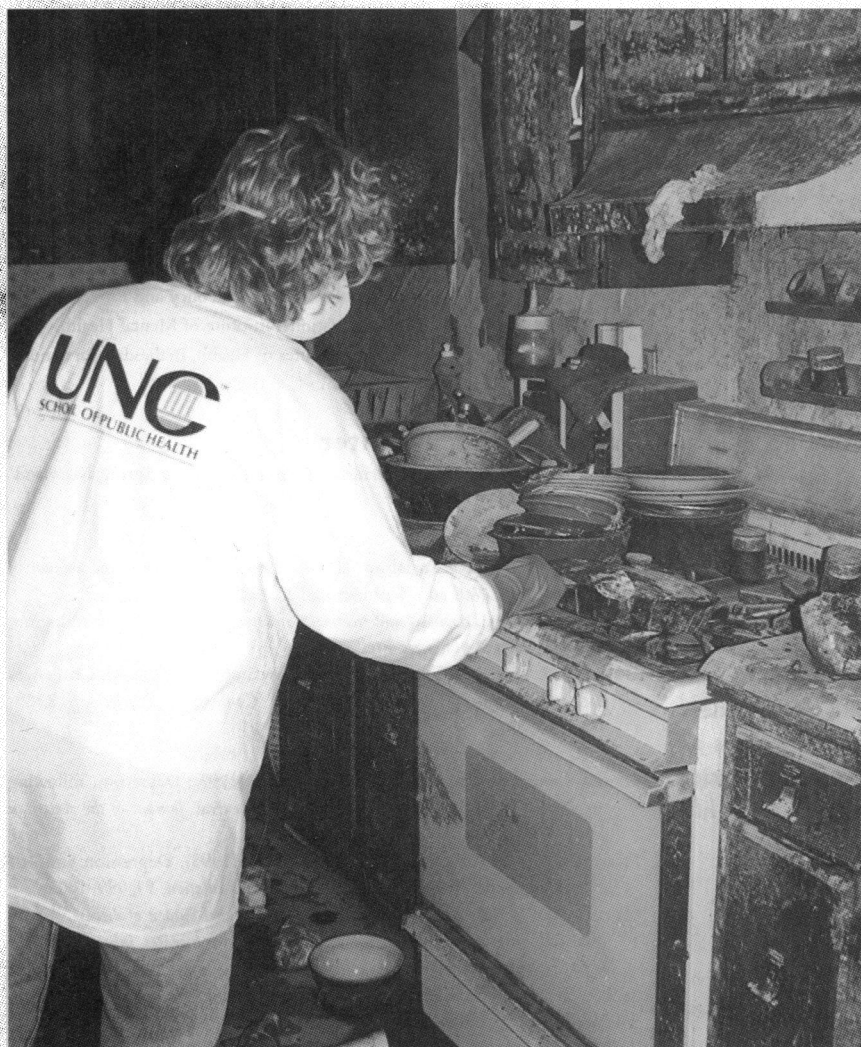
tute was launched in August 1999 with the mission of improving the health of all North Carolinians.

It will accomplish its mission by developing, applying and disseminating the information needed to improve health decisions at personal, professional, institutional and public policy levels. Further, the Institute will attempt to bridge the gap between public health knowledge and practice, providing products and services to improve health-related decision-making and service delivery by state and local governments, health departments, hospitals, community-based groups, health plans, purchasers of health care and others.

The Institute's functions are based on the Institute of Medicine recommendations (1988) to more closely link academia and practice, recommendations that are conceptualized in the Institute as depicted below. While the mission of the school includes all the functions, the NC-IPH is charged with the last two purposes.

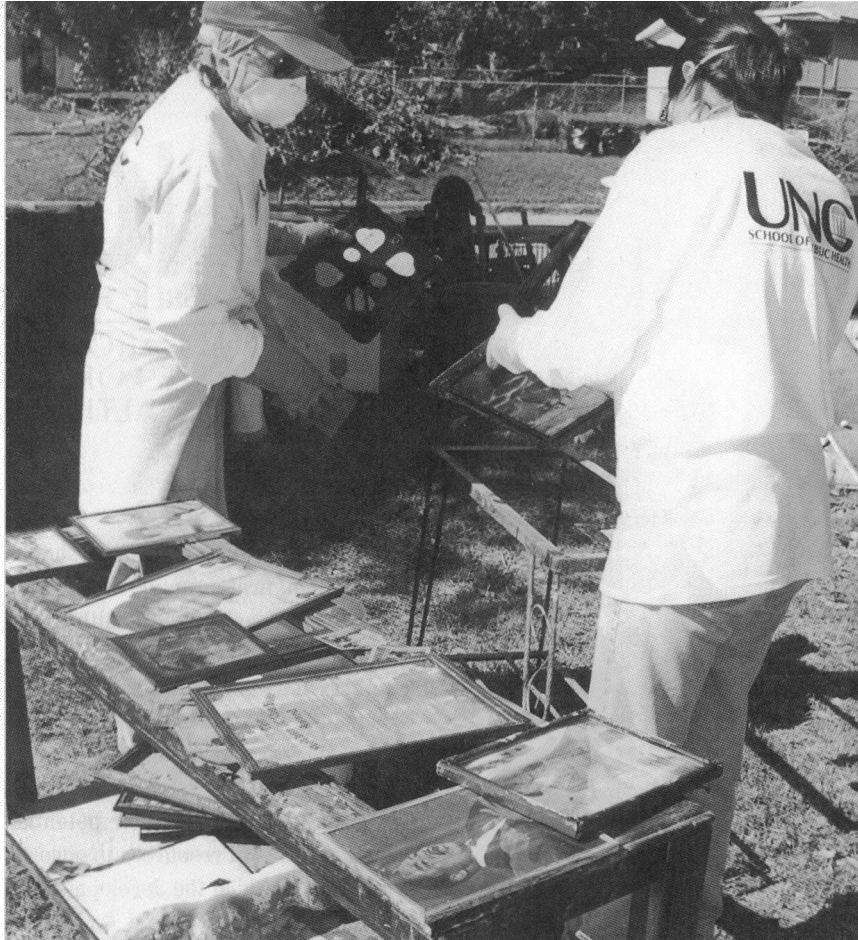


Water in this Tarboro home rose to the ceiling, leaving a daunting challenge for student volunteers who cleaned the house for the family.



The Institute connects people in "the field" to School of Public Health faculty who, with their students, are leaders in research on the core issues of public health and health care. The Institute's staff serve as the bridge between the clients and experts, who

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Students salvage photos and other memorabilia from a home in Tarboro. Items were scrubbed down to make them safe for the family to reclaim and keep.

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model and operating on a business calendar, the Institute will provide the best of academic resources and expertise in a fashion that is timely and responsive. Indeed, the initial projects that the Institute is taking on are serving to test its infrastructure—a challenge to which the program is rising with great success.

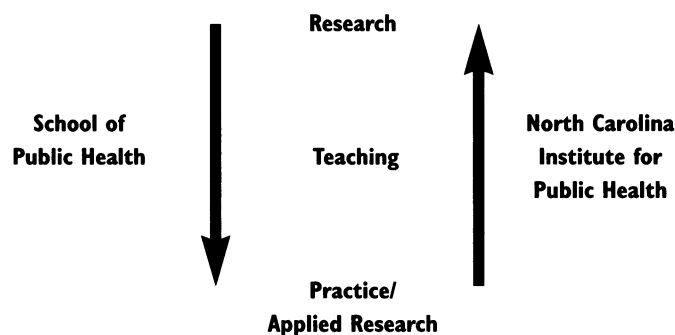
Shortly after the Institute's inauguration, Hurricane Floyd hit eastern North Carolina and the Institute began to demonstrate its mission of service to serve North Carolina. The Institute conducted an interactive videoconference in which state officials and campus experts provided vital post-hurricane health and safety information to health and medical professionals at 10 sites throughout the affected region. Institute staff distributed videotapes of the teleconference and sup-

represent a broad range of organizations, institutions and/or groups needing assistance with public health issues. They include:

- state government agencies
- local public health departments
- county government elected and appointed officials
- purchasers of health care, including employers and the state Medicaid program
- health care providers, including hospitals, physicians, ambulatory care facilities, long-term care facilities, home and community-based providers, and mental health and substance abuse service providers
- insurers and managed care organizations
- nonprofit community organizations, and
- students involved in the health professions and public policy disciplines.

The Institute provides products and services in: (1) assessment and evaluation; (2) best practices; (3) consultation and technical assistance; (4) policy analysis; (5) workforce development and (6) media relations and technical writing. Developed on a business

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porting print materials to health providers who were unable to attend the 10 videoconference sites. The program also was made available as an archived webcast for viewing via the Internet.

Under the direction of the Institute, a school-wide effort of students, faculty and staff volunteers assisted two counties in eastern North Carolina by disseminating health information and aiding in clean-up efforts. This project was conducted at the request of the state health director, who saw an urgent need to inform citizens of health risks associated with returning to their flooded homes. Many people in the affected areas could not be reached by television, radio or even mailed information, so the school's volunteers traveled door-to-door distributing health messages and explaining recommended safety precautions. This effort and other similar flood-related relief activities are continuing.

The Institute has cooperated with the UNC-CH health science schools to establish and staff the North Carolina Emergency Pharmaceutical and Med-

ical Supply Hotline, which receives donations of pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and durable medical equipment for distribution in the flood region. Also, the Institute is coordinating consultation by school faculty with practitioners in the field on storm-related topics such as communicable and infectious disease, drinking water and wastewater sanitation and injury prevention. Institute personnel are part of the state's ongoing planning effort for flood assistance, and the Institute provides scientific and technical assistance.

Other current projects include several in which the Institute is helping communities and counties with health planning and tailored interventions. One of these—which promises to be a strong team effort of community leaders, faculty and students—involves 10 counties, under the direction of seven health directors and 10 autonomous boards of county commissioners.

It is anticipated that the North Carolina Institute for Public Health will serve as a model for other states. As described by the Institute of Medicine

in 1988, schools of public health should "...establish firm practice links with state and/or local public health agencies so that significantly more faculty members may undertake professional responsibilities in these agencies, conduct research there and train students...." Further, schools of public health "...should fulfill their potential role as significant resources to government at all levels in the development of public health policy" and "...should provide students an opportunity to learn the entire scope of public health practice." In addition, "research in schools of public health should range from basic research in fields related to public health, through applied research and development, to program evaluation and implementation research." The School of Public Health at The University of North Carolina has moved in the right direction by creating the Institute. There is no doubt that students, faculty and the citizens of North Carolina have much to gain from this endeavor. The North Carolina Institute for Public Health is responding to the challenge!

ASPH regrets that the credits for the photographs in Volume 114, Number 6, pages 567 and 568 were omitted. These photographs were taken by Andres R. Alonso, courtesy of CHIP of Virginia.